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## West Virginians belie stereotypes

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Words are important. As one who chose to come to West Virginia, I write to express my disappointment and to register my objection to the recent unkind words Vice President Dick Cheney uttered as humor about West Virginians.

Mr. Cheney should know better. His words reflected his own ignorance and intolerance of the complex fabric of American society. I did not expect the vice president would apologize. Apology alone could not heal the hurt he has inflicted when he reminds 1,800,000 West Virginians of the light in which we are viewed by the administration in which he serves and by many in society in general.

I am a native New Yorker. I have lived, studied and taught across the United States and abroad. A year ago I accepted an invitation to become the eighth president of Wheeling Jesuit University, the youngest of 28 institutions of Jesuit higher learning in the United States. Georgetown University, Saint Louis University, Boston College, Fordham University, Marquette University and Xavier University are some sibling members of that family.

I chose to live and to serve in West Virginia with no prejudice or preconceptions, though I had heard and dismissed many disparaging stereotypes like Mr. Cheney has spoken.

West Virginians, I have discovered, are proud of their quality of life, and value the love of family and community. West Virginians embrace spiritual values which energize an indefatigable work ethic. They embody relentless optimism for their future. I found acceptance and hospitality for which I have come to feel quite at home.

Something of note is that 60 percent of Wheeling Jesuit University's undergraduate and graduate students are from states other than West Virginia. Yet many of these graduates choose to live in West Virginia for the quality of life and opportunity for thoughtful people. They find employment and offer leadership. It is similar for all of West Virginia's independent colleges and universities.

As a Jesuit and university educator, I count among my closest friends and colleagues men and women who are not white. Many are not American nor are they Christian. I believe that all people have an inalienable right to the pursuit of their personal and spiritual happiness. These human rights should not be constrained by the ignorant comments of arrogant politicians such as Dick Cheney.

Rather, someone of Mr. Cheney's responsibility should be setting a tone of celebration and tolerance for the uniqueness of all human beings. Sadly, he does not. In recent elections, I voted for the first time as a citizen of West Virginia. Given Dick Cheney's attitude

toward people and his public behavior, he would never get my vote. I am grateful he was not running.

Giulietti is president of Wheeling Jesuit University.

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